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withering fire, starting with a four-star press conference three days after the broadcast.

GENERAL WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: It was all there: the arrogance, the color, the drama, the contrived plot, the close shots. Everything but the truth.

CARTER: Four months later, a sensational magazine article seemed to support the General. By now, Westmoreland's complaints were attracting wide attention.

DAN RATHER: In a memo to staff members today, CBS News...

CARTER: An internal investigation at CBS acknowledged some journalistic errors. There was an offer of free air time.

SAUTER: We'll give you, General Westmoreland, 15 minutes of unedited prime-time network television to say whatever you want to say.

DAN BURT: That wasn't worth the powder to blow it to hell. I was sitting right there when that offer came through. It came through Friday afternoon by messenger at four o'clock in the afternoon, when we'd scheduled a press conference to file the suit the following Monday.

CARTER: Westmoreland did indeed file a lawsuit, still pending, for \$120 million.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: There is no way left for me to clear my name, my honor, and the honor of the military.

CARTER: George Crile produced the documentary, and he's more than willing to defend it.

GEORGE CRILE: The key aspect of the whole story is that the deception took place, that it was systematic, that it involved the heart of a key intelligence command in the middle of the only war we ever lost, that it had disastrous consequences.

CARTER: The question I keep asking you is, did you allow the case for those who were implicated, directly or indirectly, as being major players in that conspiracy, did you allow them a chance to respond?

CRILE: And I keep asking you to tell me what you have learned from these people that you feel would have been an effective piece of information.

CARTER: That's what I'd like you to see tonight, some

of the people who were in the film and some people who were at the highest levels of American military intelligence who were not interviewed, or, if interviewed, were not seen.

Two words before we start. One is about an unseen witness tonight who played a central role in the broadcast, Mike Wallace. He was not available to our cameras.

The other point is about the word conspiracy. CBS President Van Gordon Sauter now says it was the wrong word to use. But take away conspiracy, in word or concept, and you have a far different, less provocative program. Certainly, the network wasn't shy about pushing it in its ad campaign.

The central figure in this alleged conspiracy was General William Westmoreland, head of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, known as MAC-V. The goal: suppression of information that the Communists were a far larger force than Americans had been told. The accuser: former CIA analyst Sam Adams, who studies indicated we were fighting a force twice as large as official counts. Adams lost bureaucratic battles over the numbers in 1967, but he continued researching the subject. He was a paid consultant to CBS who was both interviewed by CBS and did interviews for the program, an unusual situation.

To help you keep track of the argument, from here on we're going to put a gray border around footage from the CBS film. When we do this, it means we've cut a part of that film.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: It seems to me that the strategy we are following at this time is the proper one, and that is producing...

CARTER: As CBS tells the tale, Westmoreland got bad news shortly after this optimistic speech. Back in Saigon, his top intelligence officer told him the enemy was larger than he had thought.

GENERAL JOSEPH MCCHRISTIAN: He was quite disturbed by it. And by the time I left his office, I had the definite impression that he felt that if he sent those figures back to Washington at that time, it would create a political bombshell.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: I did not accept his recommendation. I did not accept it. And I didn't accept it because of political reasons -- I may have mentioned this. I guess I did. But that was not the fundamental thing. I just didn't accept it.

CRILE: If there's ever one interview which created a whole shift in the approach of a documentary or a reporting job,

it was that one with General Westmoreland, in which he explained why he did it.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: I did not accept it, and I didn't accept it because of political reasons. That was...

CRILE: He didn't accept the report. He didn't allow it to be passed on to Washington, and he didn't do it for political reasons.

CARTER: Those are the two times he spoke of his actions being for political reasons?

CRILE: Well, they're in the transcript. You've read it. You know, in two instances, and placed quite closely together.

CARTER: What's also in the transcript are three separate occasions that General Westmoreland said politics was a non-issue, and three times that he said accuracy or an accurate appraisal was his main concern.

But CBS implies that the deception really begins after McChristian leaves Vietnam. He was replaced by General Phillip Davidson. Davidson was MAC-V's chief intelligence officer during the entire period the documentary claims a conspiracy took place.

GENERAL PHILLIP DAVIDSON: If anybody was going to cook the books, if anybody was going to manipulate enemy strength figures, I had to be the pivotal man to do it.

CARTER: No one at CBS contacted Davidson at any point during the 15 months the documentary was in production.

CRILE: We called him a number of times. It was our understanding that Davidson was very sick, supposedly on his death bed.

GENERAL DAVIDSON: In 1981, I remarried. Certainly not the actions of a dying man. I played golf and I do play golf every day.

CRILE: You've probably talked to him by now, I assume. What is it that Davidson has to say that we should have included in there?

GENERAL DAVIDSON: Just to set the record straight, neither General Westmoreland nor anybody else in a position of authority over me ever gave me any order, any directive, any hint, any indication to manipulate enemy strength figures, to minimize enemy strength figures, or to suppress them. Nor did I ever give any such order to the people who worked for me.

CARTER: That's what the man says. You don't have to believe him. But if you want to make the case that CBS did, that, quote, there was a conspiracy at the highest levels of military intelligence, he deserves a hearing.

CBS found people who supported its thesis that enemy strength numbers were arbitrarily changed. One is a young officer who made a strong impression.

LT. RICHARD MCARTHUR: I found that someone was changing the numbers, the numbers that were reported by the sector advisers in the field.

GENERAL DAVIDSON: I do recall a Lieutenant McArthur briefed me one day, and he simply had not done his work.

CARTER: General Davidson recalls rejecting a McArthur report, along with estimates from many others.

GENERAL DAVIDSON: My job was not to accept everything some colonel or captain came up and gave me. My job was to look at that in the light of my experience and to see whether I think it's right or wrong.

CARTER: McArthur sticks by the story as he saw it. But he was low in the chain of command.

Let's look at some more evidence, this time from a much higher source.

COLONEL GAINS HAWKINS: There was no mistaking the message.

CRILE: Which was?

COLONEL HAWKINS: That there was a great concern about the impact of these figures, that they're being high.

CRILE: The whole thing centers around your ability to understand the experience of Colonel Gains Hawkins, a man who wanted to do his job and who wanted to win the war, and found that in the spring of 1967, as order of battle chief, the man that the whole country relied on to tell them who the enemy was, that he was no longer permitted to use the evidence available to him.

CARTER: Hawkins is a key figure. So I went to see him in West Point, Mississippi.

COLONEL HAWKINS: Mark Hazzard likes to say that I count Republican votes like I counted guerrillas in Vietnam.

[Laughter]

COLONEL HAWKINS: I wish to hell we had as many Republicans.

[Laughter]

CARTER: I asked Hawkins to describe his encounters with General Westmoreland.

COLONEL HAWKINS: No, sir. No, sir. I never got any direct order.

CARTER: There was no order from Westmoreland, "Reduce these numbers."

COLONEL HAWKINS: "Take another look," I think was the expression was used.

CARTER: What did you think that meant?

COLONEL HAWKINS: Bring 'em down.

CARTER: Bring 'em down because of what?

COLONEL HAWKINS: Because of the reaction, the public reaction to them. This is what I interpreted. There was no direct order. This is my interpretation.

CARTER: And you went back and you cut the figures?

COLONEL HAWKINS: I cooked 'em.

CARTER: Hawkins admits he faked the figures. Hawkins also repeatedly told me there was no direct order, as he repeatedly told George Crile. That seems to make it difficult to prove a conspiracy.

CRILE: Oh, look, Hodding. I mean you're too experienced in government and in military to get involved in semantical questions like that. Sure, if you're talking about whether or not General Westmoreland, General Davidson, Colonel Morris ever wrote out an order and signed it and told somebody to go do something wrong, okay, maybe there was no conspiracy, if that's the way you want to put it.

CARTER: But "orders" is the word CBS repeatedly uses. It comes up when the network describes MAC-V's position during a series of heated meetings of the National Intelligence Estimate Board. At these meetings, representatives of the various U.S. intelligence agencies tried to agree on the size of the enemy.

There was a battle between Westmoreland's people and the CIA. The CIA arguing that a true count of the enemy meant including people who were not in regular armed units.

Gains Hawkins was a military delegate, and CBS said he had to play out a charade because Westmoreland had ordered a ceiling on the military's numbers.

MIKE WALLACE: Westmoreland says he doesn't recall these orders. But the head of MAC-V's delegation told us that General Westmoreland had in fact personally instructed him not to allow the total to go over 300,000.

CARTER: Were you ordered by General Westmoreland to hold to a set of figures, come what may?

GENERAL GEORGE GODDING: No, I was not ordered to hold any set of figures.

CARTER: This is General George Godding, the head of the MAC-V delegation, and the man Mike Wallace said received a direct order to hold to a ceiling. CBS interviewed Godding, but not on camera.

CRILE: As General Godding told us repeatedly on the telephone...

CARTER: On camera, General Godding denies it. On camera, General Godding, with a transcript available, says that is not so.

CRILE: All right. But was he ever told to keep within the parameters of the May order of battle, which was a number, which was 296,000? If you'd asked him it that way, he might...

CARTER: We asked him a whole set of questions on camera.

CRILE: Did you ask him it that way?

CARTER: It has been said in papers that the order of battle figures upon which you must settle could not exceed the parameters of the May order of battle. Did General Westmoreland instruct you to that effect?

GENERAL GODDING: No, he did not.

CARTER: If Westmoreland didn't give those instructions, did anyone?

GENERAL DAVIDSON: I don't recall giving George Godding,

General Godding, any particular instructions. Looking back on it, I probably told him, "This is our figure. We've gone over all of these things. This is the best figure we can determine. Now, if these people have information we don't have, let us know about it. Maybe we can adjust, one way or the other."

CARTER: Did General Westmoreland impose a ceiling? I don't know. But now you've heard from the man who was supposed to have received the order and from the man who would have given it to him. And they tell a different story from the one Mike Wallace told.

It was during the intelligence board meetings that General Westmoreland realized he had a problem, according to CBS. A true count of the enemy would be embarrassing to the President's claim of progress.

Here's what Mike Wallace says happened next.

WALLACE: It was at this point that General Westmoreland pursued a new tactic. He proposed that an entire category of the Viet Cong army, the self-defense militia, a force of more than 70,000, simply be dropped from the order of battle.

GEORGE CARVER: There was an intense debate about how we ought to keep books on the Viet Cong.

CARTER: George Carver was the CIA's top man for Vietnamese affairs. CBS did not interview him until the film was completed.

CRILE: What did George Carver have to say, in your opinion, that was significant, that would have changed the picture of this whole story?

CARVER: What finally broke the impasse was a session, a private session that I had with General Westmoreland.

CARTER: At that session, Carver proposed describing the disputed Viet Cong forces in words instead of the numbers the military had trouble accepting.

CARVER: Forcing someone to read a couple of sentences because there wasn't a damn number would give him more enlightenment and more understanding of what we were dealing with than a number which, no matter what you picked, was liable to be spurious.

CARTER: George Carver says he volunteered the solution, which he felt was a sensible compromise. Mike Wallace said:

WALLACE: General Westmoreland had now won the intelligence war. And so instead of being told of an enemy army of more than half a million, the President, the Congress, and the American public were told there were only 248,000 Viet Cong left.

CARVER: That's pretty strong stuff. It would have been dreadful if it were true. It doesn't happen to be true.

CARTER: So, who was in the dark? Let's start with Congress.

OTIS PIKE: I was on the Armed Services Committee at the time, and they gave us numbers every month.

CARTER: This is former Congressman Otis Pike. He chaired a committee that conducted a lengthy investigation of the intelligence community in 1975.

PIKE: I think there was a tendency to fudge the numbers, to put the best possible face on things. Nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news. But I don't think we took the numbers too seriously.

CARTER: And what about the people? Were they uninformed? In the summer and fall of the alleged conspiracy, there was a steady flow of stories on the debate over the strength of the enemy, all laid out for Americans to see: numbers, units, manpower. And it's impossible to believe that Lyndon Johnson, a voracious reader, wasn't seeing them as well. What President Johnson may not have been seeing, CBS says, were reports that the North Vietnamese were pouring southward during the fall of 1967.

MAC-V's official numbers were five to six thousand a month. CBS found an officer who was reporting figures as high as 25,000 a month.

WALLACE: And that amounted to a near invasion. But those reports of a dramatically increased infiltration were systematically blocked.

CARTER: Blocked, we are led to believe, from getting to the President, with tragic consequences.

WALLACE: And so the President of the United States, the American Army in Vietnam, and the American public back home were destined to be caught totally unprepared for the size of the attack that was coming the following month. The President had been alerted to the enemy's intentions, but no one had been able or willing to inform him of the enemy's capability.

CARTER: No one? What about MAC-V's chief of intelligence?

GENERAL DAVIDSON: In mid-November 1967, through a highly sensitive source, which is classified to this day, we began to see the preparation for movement of major North Vietnamese divisions. But this was ominous, particularly since we knew a major offensive was in the offing, you see. Gee, here are the guys that are going to do it.

CARTER: But was the word getting to Washington?

CARVER: My in box was cascading every day, as was everybody else's in Washington concerned with this, with cables on this particular thing.

CARTER: The President knew this?

CARVER: Of course the President knew it. I talked almost daily to Walt Rostow, who was his assistant for national security affairs.

WALT ROSTOW: I generated a flow to him of all manner of information, including, you know, reports that didn't come from high-level sources. And he absorbed it all.

CARTER: Rostow says his CBS interview lasted three hours. Crile used none of it.

CRILE: Where in the interview, from your reading, do you find Walt Rostow making points that you think should have been included because they would have challenged the thesis of the broadcast?

CARTER: In his interview with us, and with Mike Wallace, Rostow repeatedly made this point.

ROSTOW: We had from communications intelligence quite adequate information on the movement of regular North Vietnamese units. We could track them from their bases down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. And we saw them moving. They didn't come marching down the Ho Chi Minh Trail with flags flying and a band playing. They came down in -- but in big units. We knew the regiments and the battalion numbers. And they were coming down, and they had to be dealt with.

CARTER: Did the message get through? Ten years before Crile began work on his documentary, Lyndon Johnson wrote about watching a mammoth buildup of enemy troops and supplies: "Our intelligence apparatus informed us conclusively that the Communists were preparing for an all-out assault." What's more, in

December of that year, he told the Australian Cabinet that he, quote, foresaw the North Vietnamese using kamikaze tactics in the weeks ahead.

ROSTOW: I think that if he had told the American people what he had told the Australian Cabinet, that people would have been very much prepared -- better prepared for what was coming.

CARTER: The American Embassy under enemy control. U.S. commandos battling for our Saigon stronghold. Pictures that shocked those who believed we were winning the war. It all took place on the first day of the sacred Vietnamese holiday Tet. How could the enemy be so bold? How could we be so suprised?

According to Wallace and Crile, the answer was simple: The intelligence deception had left us unprepared for the size of the attack at Tet. And Tet, they implied, was a military defeat that ultimately brought down Lyndon Johnson and may have cost us the war.

Did we lose at Tet? A key CBS witness:

COLONEL HAWKINS: We did not lose militarily. We didn't -- I think we whipped the shit out of 'em at Tet.

AMBASSADOR KOMER: It was a genuine tactical surprise.

CARTER: Robert Komer was the number three man at MAC-V when Tet broke out. He was not interviewed by CBS.

AMBASSADOR KOMER: We won militarily, and the Vietnamese won psychologically, the North Vietnamese.

CARTER: Interestingly, an important former Viet Cong leader agrees. Last fall Truong Nhu Tang (?) wrote, "The Tet offensive proved catastrophie to our plans. Irony of the Vietnamese War that our propaganda transformed this military debacle into a brilliant victory." Just how bad was the debacle? Tang says it cost "one-half our forces."

No one ever accused Westmoreland of undercounting enemy bodies. And at the end of Tet, MAC-V counted 50,000 enemy dead. Even allowing for wounded, the enemy forces seemed closer to MAC-V's estimates than the CIA figures CBS supports.

GENERAL DAVIDSON: As a matter of fact, both CIA and ourselves had given the enemy the capability of mounting 118-120 thousand troops. He didn't use that many.

CARTER: George Allen, the highest-ranking CIA man presented by CBS, agrees that numbers weren't the problem at Tet.

GEORGE ALLEN: The scale of the offensive, in reality, was consistent with either the 300 or 500 thousand number. We just don't know how many. I can't say how many were involved. I know it was more than 86,000.

CARTER: So, in any case, whatever the problem was with Tet, it was not a case of cooked figures leaving us unprepared for the scope of the attack.

ALLEN: That's my view.

CARTER: Let's go back to the beginning, to the CBS premise. What is it that CBS was going to prove?

WALLACE: We're going to present evidence of what we have come to believe was a conscious effort, indeed a conspiracy at the highest levels of American military intelligence to suppress and alter critical intelligence on the enemy in the year leading up to the Tet offensive.

CRILE: If you go collect the pieces of this puzzle and you talk to the individual officers in charge of different areas of estimating enemy strength and you see the connections between them, what unfolds is a pattern which constitutes a deception campaign, which I felt, still feel, is appropriate to label a conspiracy to deceive.

CARTER: That isn't the way the man who admitted he cooked figures sees it.

COLONEL HAWKINS: I never have subscribed to the conspiracy theory that the documentary brought out.

CARTER: Another CBS witness:

ALLEN: ...that I would not have characterized the episode as a conspiracy, per se; but more as a conflict between technicians attempting to do an intelligence kind of assessment and policy people who have political objectives they're trying to satisfy.

AMBASSADOR KOMER: Westy had his flaws. We did lose the war. Not just his responsibility, but that of many of the rest of us, myself included. But the one thing that no one would ever think Westmoreland would do would be to engage in deception and conspiracy. All of us called Westy an Eagle Scout.

GENERAL DAVIDSON: The conspiracy, if any existed, to be effective, had to be far beyond the confines of MAC-V. It would have had to spread into the top of CIA, into the top of the State Department, into the Pentagon, the Defense Department, the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Council, the National Security Agency, and into the White House and to the President himself.

PIKE: If there was one person responsible, he is now deceased, and that would have to have been the President of the United States.

CARTER: And from the man who led CBS to the story, their paid consultant and witness, former CIA analyst Sam Adams.

SAM ADAMS: There was an intention to deceive the American public. I find it less plausible that there was an intention to deceive the President. I find it even less plausible that there was an intention to deceive the troops out in the field. Which isn't to say it didn't happen. But I think that, you know, this in fact did result; there people were deceived. But I think it was an unintended deception.

CARTER: That's not a bad starting point for what could be a fascinating documentary. But it wouldn't be the clean-cut morality tale of good and evil, conspirators and victims spun out by Wallace and Crile.

History may yet decide there was indeed a conspiracy in Saigon to fake the numbers. But at this point, the evidence is less compelling, the witnesses are more contradictory, and the possible conclusions less obvious than the documentary suggests.

CBS is entitled to its opinion. But we're entitled to a more balanced presentation. Even if you're sure of guilt, there's a vast difference between a fair trial and a lynching. It's a distinction that was badly blurred when CBS made "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception."

For Inside Story, I'm Hodding Carter.